

# University of Chester



**This work has been submitted to ChesterRep – the University of Chester's  
online research repository**

**<http://chesterrep.openrepository.com>**

Author(s): Jeremy Peach

Title: Written feedback and deep approaches to student learning: Contradictory or complimentary?

Date: 2004

Originally published in: Innovation: Learning and Teaching Journal

Example citation: Peach, J. (2004). Written feedback and deep approaches to student learning: Contradictory or complimentary? *Innovation: Learning and Teaching Journal*, 6

Version of item: Author's post-print

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/224918>

## Written Feedback and Deep Approaches to Student Learning: Contradictory or Complimentary?

Jeremy Peach  
Senior Lecturer  
University of Chester  
Centre for Work based Studies: Professional Development

### 1. Abstract

This paper is concerned with the use of written feedback provided to students following both formative and summative assessment exercises and asks the if written feedback is commensurate with the notion of engendering, and or maintaining, a deep approach to student learning.

I argue that for written feedback to be complimentary to a deep approach to learning students need to be able to correctly interpret tutors written comments and that students should be actively engaged in analytical and reflective activities. My argument is based upon current literature and a research project conducted with a group of students who are undertaking a post graduate programme.

To address these issues I suggest that departments explore the opportunities students have for gaining access to the language of higher education and that research is conducted to ascertain the extent to which written feedback is commenting upon the intellectual content of students' assessment activities and tasks. In addition a tool constructed by Weedon (2000), that seeks to engage students in analytical and reflective activities with regard to the written feedback they receive should be developed and contextualised for use within specific programmes and modules.

*Keywords: surface and deep learning, written feedback, assessment, reflection*

## //. Introduction

This paper describes a project which explored the question of whether written feedback to students, following formative and summative assessment tasks, is complimentary or contradictory to the notion of aiding students to take a deep approach to their learning.

The rationale for this research is four fold:

- i) the notion of deep learning is commensurate within the overall purpose of Higher Education (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997)
- ii) feedback is central to the process of learning, (Schmidt *et al* 1990, Race 1996, Rowntree 1997, Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Brown and Knight 1998, Knight 1998, Biggs 1999, Higgins 2000, Weedon 2000, Race and Brown 2001)
- iii) written feedback plays an active part within the student experience (Williams 1993 cited in Brown and Knight 1998 p43, Higgins 2000, Mutch 2001) and
- iv) the crucial role of teachers within the feedback process.

This final point is highlighted by Race and Brown (2001 p36) who assert that students perceive the feedback they receive from lecturers and tutors as "*expert witness feedback*". This notion is further underpinned within a study conducted by Williams (1993 cited in Brown and Knight 1998 p43) which identifies that students regard the provision of feedback as one of the five key characteristics of effective lecturers. However students, lecturing and administrative staff all identified this as an area of weakness within academic practice. This point is highlighted within research conducted by Turner (1993 cited in Brown and Knight 1988 p44) which shows the variable quality of written feedback and Knights (1988) conclusions that that feedback often fails to provide useful support for the learning process and future tasks.

The following text provides an overview of current literature and a review of the results from a recent research exercise relating to written feedback and learning. The paper concludes with an identification of the key issues and suggestions for enhancing academic practice.

### III. Analysis of Literature


There is much literature to support the notion that feedback provides a crucial role in enhancing and developing students learning and the centrality of feedback within the learning process, Rowntree (1996), Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997), Brown and Knight (1998) Higgins (2000), Weedon (2000), Race and Brown (2001).

Schmidt *et al* (1990 cited in Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997 p 21) discuss the accelerated rate of learning that can be achieved through feedback and Race (1996) concludes that feedback is one of four factors that are crucial to student learning. In addition Knight (1998) asserts that feedback is the lifeblood of learning. These views suggest that feedback has a motivational context and that students should actively engage with their feedback.

A student may be *intrinsically* motivated where learning is out of interest, or *extrinsically* motivated where they perform in order to gain a positive reward or avoid something negative. However the teaching context, content and climate, of which feedback is an intrinsic and central element, will impact upon a student's motivation, Brown and Knight (1998), Biggs (1999) and consequently a student's approach to learning. The implication according to Biggs (1999) is that extrinsic motivation leads to a surface approach to learning and an intrinsic motivation to a deep approach.

Rust (2002; p153) claims that *"research evidence would suggest that just giving feedback to students without requiring them to actively engage with it is likely to have only limited effect"*, which echoes Thomas J. Shuell, (1986, cited in Biggs 1999 p25) who emphasises that the focus should be on what the student does rather than the teacher. This suggests that the teacher should put in place conditions that will maximise the chances of students engaging with the feedback to enhance their learning and adopt a deep approach. The teacher's task in supporting learning has not concluded at the point of providing feedback.

In addition to requiring students to actively engage in the process, literature also suggests that there are a number of factors or attributes of written feedback that will aid the learning process, Rowntree, 1997, Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Anderson, Brown and Race, 1998, Brown and Knight 1998, Falchikov, 1998, Higgins 2000, Race 2002.

 *Timely:* feedback should be provided as soon after the event as is possible. Research would appear to emphasise that the time between completing a task and receiving feedback will affect on the impact it has.

- *Tone:* The feedback should be encouraging and positive, some research suggests that positive elements should be highlighted before negative comments as students will then be more receptive to receiving the criticisms of their work. Also the comments should be phrased in positive language, rather than emphasising only what was incorrect. The feedback should explore what the student could or should have done, and be developmental in nature.
- *Valid:* Feedback should match the aspects a student is being assessed upon and be specific to the assessment criteria. Rorty (1989 cited in Falchikov, 1998) asserts that we use a set of words to justify our actions and beliefs and to formulate praise for our friends and contempt for our enemies. Whilst it may be important to correct grammatical errors and communication, the feedback should also emphasize the important academic issues such as knowledge and understanding.
- *Clarity (and legibility):* Feedback should be crafted in ways that are understandable to the student, and not lock an already closed door. It should avoid academic assumptions about the way students understand, perceive and are able to utilise it. It is particularly important to remember that with written feedback there are no visual clues, often referred to as body language to aid the process of interpretation and or clarification and often the student cannot seek immediate verbal clarification. These issues underpin the importance of providing feedback that is not open to misinterpretation.
- *Detailed but succinct:* The feedback should provide sufficient detail that it is meaningful and at the same time direct so the point of the comment is usefully highlighted.
- *Transferable:* This clearly relates to formative feedback and involves issues of developmental feedback, which a student can apply to other work and where appropriate other situations.
- *Encourage reflection:* The feedback should create a climate of encouragement where the student is motivated to consider their work in light of the comments. This is consistent with Kolb's learning cycle (1976 / 1984 cited in, Bull and Pendlebury 1997 pp 30 -31) and has a relationship with Rust's (2002) assertion regarding the active engagement of students.

One may also add that the outcome, what the students do with the feedback and whether it aids or encourages students to adopt a deep approach to their learning is the overall measurement on the effectiveness of the feedback. How much each of these factors will engender or maintain this type of approach to learning is not detailed within the literature, however it may be inferred that these factors may not in themselves lead to a student adopting a

deep approach, but without the provision of these factors it is unlikely to do so.

In addition to be effective written feedback should take into account each student's needs, abilities, personality and motivation. It should be individual and intimate in nature, Race (2002).

Returning to the issue of clarity the factors do not attend to the inherent assumptions that form the basis of any communication. Higgins (2000 pp 5-6) when discussing the subjectivity and contested meaning involved in the communication process, identifies the complexity of assessment feedback as a social relationship that involves *"power, emotion, control, authority and discourse"*. Higgins assertion is that feedback is not a neutral process and within this process *"meaning is subjectively created, mediated, transformed, accepted, contested, manipulated and rejected"*.

The implications of Higgins assertions are that tutors need to consider how they construct the feedback and question their own assumptions about knowledge, concepts, rules and conventions and how the student understands their comments, given their access to academic discourses concerning both the subject matter and the academic language that is used. Definitions of words such as analysis and evaluation are not shared amongst all academic disciplines, and there is a tacit assumption that students all share a common understanding of these terms. As such there is a need to agree with students common understandings of academic terms, practices and conventions.

When providing feedback a tutor needs to create a dialogue with the student based upon examples of their work and the tone of feedback should not engender, or perpetuate the perception that knowledge is absolute. It should empower students to question, challenge and critique ideas and concepts and not reinforce the perception that this is the sole domain of the tutor.

The point concerning interpretation is congruent with the research of written feedback by Weedon (2000) who concluded that there can be a misinterpretation of tutors' comments by students and that this can create an emotional response that was not expected or meant by the tutor. Weedon highlights this in particular whilst discussing the problematic nature of tutors mixed messages when including positive and negative comments within the same sentence. In addition Weedon's research highlighted that a shared agenda between tutor and student should not necessarily be expected because of a students previous academic experience. Weedon concludes that the more a student has to supply in terms of interpretation the greater the potential for misunderstanding. Tutors and students should explore assumptions of shared meanings and students should be encouraged to be actively engaged in activities of analysis and reflection.

Literature supports the notion of the congruence between deep learning and the aims of Higher Education. According to Greer (2002) the UK adopts a transformative or constructivist model of learning which encourages the student to critically explore their own thinking, knowledge, and understanding of the subject. This model proposes that meaning is not imposed on, but created by students and emphasises the search for meaning at the heart of H.E. and highlights the concept of feedback that promotes and empowers learning, (Weedon 2000, Race 2002).

Research also suggests that students adopt either a surface or deep approach to learning, (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Greer 2002, Race, 2002). A definition of deep learning is, according to Marton and Saljo (1976, cited in Greer 2002 p6), *"to comprehend the material and develop a critical understanding of the subject"*. Where students adopt this approach they are searching for meaning or 'understanding – seeking', Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997). Essentially a deep learning approach uses the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of cognitive domains (Bloom, 1965 cited in Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997 p36), such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

The idea that knowledge seeking is always inferior to seeking understanding is questionable. Knowing what and how can be as important as knowing why, indeed, within certain subject areas a base of knowledge is necessary before understanding may be developed, Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997).

An approach to learning is situational (Greer 2002) and dependant upon a number of contextual factors, the pedagogy, the teaching climate Biggs (1999) and students' levels of subject knowledge, (Morgan *et al*/ 1982 cited in Greer 2002 p7, Biggs 1999). Ramsden (1992 cited in Greer 2002 p7) links the approach a student has to their interest in a subject which is consistent with the notions of motivation. Greer (2002) suggests that an overloaded curriculum may lead to students adopting a particular approach. Also students make strategic decisions with regard to the approach they adopt (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997), such as the perception of what the lecturer requires and whether they consider a deep approach is inappropriate, for example what a student may perceive to be in an examination and how that is likely to be assessed, or if s/he is instructed or guided toward a particular approach by the lecturer.

In summary, feedback is central to the learning process and is a key part of pedagogy, the expansion of student numbers and the subsequent reduction in face to face contact between tutors and students place, according to Higgins (2000 p1) *"a greater reliance on written correspondence"*. Student motivation, the interpretation that students place on written comments, what students do and are required to do with the feedback, the emphasis a tutor places upon understanding, the amount and diversity of feedback provided are vital factors in helping to engender or reinforce a deep approach to learning.

#### *IV. Student Feedback*

Research was undertaken to ascertain students approach to their learning, whether they were able to interpret the written feedback in a way that enhanced their learning, how they used the written feedback they have received, how it enhanced their learning and if it encouraged them to maintain or adopt a deep approach. To elicit this information firstly a written questionnaire was distributed to thirty students this was followed by semi structured interviews with six students.

To establish if any connections existed between the students' responses and their achievements, the sample of students was divided into approximately three equal groups formed based on their marks throughout their programme of learning. Within the first phase each group consisted of ten students, two were then selected from each group to participate in the semi structured interviews.

The groups were formed on the basis of their marks either improving, remaining reasonably static, or on the variability of marks they have achieved. A figure of ten marks was used to determine which group a particular student would be placed into. The figure of ten was used as this differentiates between degree bands. If a student's mark within each piece of assessed work improved on each occasion by approximately ten marks they were placed into the improving group. If a student had not improved their mark by approximately ten they were placed in the static group and if a student's mark was neither improving by the figure of ten nor static they were placed in the variable group. In addition as each student provided their name on the returned questionnaires the responses were also analysed for any issues that may emerge in relation to their marks and their specific comments. A student may be placed within the static group, however they may be achieving marks equivalent to a distinction or a bare pass. As such this information may show some correlation between their use and understanding of the tutor's comments and their achievements.

In order to elicit whether students perceived that they had an orientation toward a surface or deep approach, each was asked series of questions that according to Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997) and Biggs (2001) would be influential such as: their reason for undertaking the programme, the level of importance they placed on the programme, their interest in the subject, if they found satisfaction in problem solving, being creative, if they were attracted toward relationships between concepts and how they would interpret specific comments. The issue of interpretation was included for two reasons i) if a student was unable to interpret the comments they may not be able to use the feedback to alter their approach and ii) if they were able to interpret the comments how did they use them.



A further set of questions were asked concerning the students use of the written comments, what type of feedback they found most useful e.g. encouraging, highly prescriptive/controlling or empowering. They were also asked to comment on what they perceived to be the purpose of the feedback and how they used the comments, how much time they spent analysing them, what activities they undertook following their analysis and what they used the comments for.

Several questions were also asked with regard to their views on the quality of the written feedback they have received as a way of evaluating the feedback given by the course tutors and also to establish any congruence or incongruence between their answers in this section and other responses.

The target group for the research exercise were students who were undertaking a Post graduate Certificate. Each student has completed a minimum of three pieces of assessed work and as such has received written feedback on at least three occasions. It is worth highlighting that although each assessment activity requires students to explore different managerial issues all pieces of assessed work are submitted in the form of a written management report. The assessment criteria used for each activity is similar in that a high level of weighting within the marking scheme is given for the students understanding of relevant conceptual frameworks, models and underpinning theories demonstrated through analysis, evaluation and application within their own work place practice(s). As such although each assessment exercise is summative the feedback is both summative and formative.

Written comments are provided to each student via both a feedback form and comments contained within the margins of each students report. The feedback form is divided into sub sections each appertaining to a specific element of the marking criteria and tutors comments are recorded against each element of the criteria.

It is worth highlighting that the research has a number of constraints and the conclusions that are drawn should bear in mind the following: the results only apply to this particular group of students, the information analysed is dependant upon, honesty, self-knowledge regarding their approach to learning, and their perceptions of written feedback. The research may also be further constrained as the student group may be seen to lack diversity e.g. they are all postgraduate students studying the same subject, in addition the sample size is small.

The following text provides an overview of the responses from the questionnaire survey.

It can be inferred that from the responses that all the students' surveyed perceived that they adopt a deep approach to their learning within this particular programme of study. This inference is made by every student

saying that they found the programme of high interest, that it is important, they enjoy looking for and finding unexpected answers to problems, they describe their learning as having an intrinsic curiosity, they enjoy being creative and imaginative within their learning, and looking for relationships that exist between concepts and they are attracted to develop a critical understanding of the subject. They also stated that the assignments enhanced their learning.

There was some difference with regard to students' motivation for undertaking the programme, as shown in the table below, however there was no correlation with either the group they were placed in or the marks they had achieved.

REASON/MOTIVATION FOR UNDERTAKING THE PROGRAMME	FIRST PRIORITY	SECOND PRIORITY
GAINING AN IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBJECT	40%	18%
ENHANCE THEIR PRACTICE	35%	28%
GAIN A QUALIFICATION	15%	35%
ADVANCE THEIR CAREER	10%	0%
GAIN KNOWLEDGE OF UNDERPINNING THEORIES AND CONCEPTS	0%	15%
OTHER	0%	4%

Given that these responses indicate a deep approach to learning, which is underpinned by levels of selection students made with regard to their main motivation there is some incongruence with the response given by 90% of students that the mark they achieved was the most important element of the feedback, and only 10% saying that the tutors feedback was the most important element of the written feedback, which both indicate a surface approach to learning.

Again irregardless of the group students were placed in 85% of students spend, according to their response, between 5 and 10 minutes analysing the tutor's comments on the official feedback form, with the further 14% spending between 10 and 20 minutes, only 1% spent longer than this time. In addition with regard to the time spent analysing the tutor's comments contained in the margins of their work 65% stated that they spend a further 10 and 20 minutes on this activity, 23% spending 5 to 10 minutes and 12% spending 20 to 30 minutes.

None of the students used the analysis of their feedback to re-visit the areas in which according to their feedback required further development, although the majority (46%) stated that this was one of the main reason tutors provided the feedback. Although 21% stated that the main purpose of the tutors' written comments was to justify the mark tutors' had awarded, 23% felt that it was provided to aid their learning for future assessed pieces of work, which was the main use students' had for the comments. 74% stated that they used the comments as a guide to improve their next assignments. However apart from the initial analysis only a small proportion, 15%, reviewed the comments on more than one occasion, conducted any type of reflective activity, discussed them with another person or compared them with previous comments to evaluate the progress of their learning.

This revealed the main area of difference between the students, some students who were achieving marks at a distinction level were conducting no reflective activity whilst some students who were achieving bare passes were spending the highest proportion of time analysing the comments and conducting reflective activities.

In addition a difference was established between the interpretations students placed on the written comments contained within the questionnaire. Those students who were achieving marks at a distinction level were interpreting the comments as intended by the tutors whilst those students achieving a bare pass and 65% of those contained in the variable group were not.

This was established by firstly analysing the responses to two questions contained within the questionnaire. Students were provided with two statements concerning analysis and evaluation that are standard comments from their programme of learning and were asked to provide their interpretation. Secondly during the semi structured interviews a sample of their own work and the associated written comments were discussed to

establish the degree of congruence between the students' interpretation and that of the tutor. Only two students, both achieving high marks, of the six interviewed, were able to interpret the comments as intended by the tutor.

Given the responses to questions concerning motivation, subject interest, level of importance placed on the subject in terms of professional practice, all the interviewees would be described as having a deep approach. The interviews established that students who were not as confident with regard to their learning and professional practice and inexperienced in terms of academic experience and qualification were adopting a surface approach, but wished to use a deep approach. This may be inferred by students highlighting their desire and attempts to use this approach but their levels of subject knowledge and learning support mechanisms did not allow for this to take place.

All students commented that the workload, particularly in terms of assessment did not support them in always adopting a deep approach. All commented on the need to focus on the next assessment, all but one of those interviewed said they would have liked the opportunity, in terms of time and support, to fully analyse the tutors' written comments and to further explore their previous assessed work.

In response to questions regarding the way they used the written comments two of the students had, outside of any of the programme requirements, established and were involved in informal and regular 'learning groups' with other students which amongst other activities, shared results and written feedback from assessed work as a way of sharing their approach and learning. One student whilst reading the feedback noted down points of importance. Four students said that they used the feedback to aid their next assessed work, however apart from saying that this was to ensure that they did not make the same mistake(s) again they were unable to provide any specific way that they did this. All felt that it was important to their learning but were somewhat bereft at saying how they may be able to fully utilise it.

All the students commented either via the questionnaire or the semi-structured interviews that the elements of written feedback highlighted on earlier were important. In particular all of those interviewed remarked that written comments that were linked to specific marking criteria were the most important element. There was disagreement between the content and tone of the written feedback. Whilst a majority of those in the static group and the variable group preferred feedback that was highly prescriptive, the majority of those in the improving group required comments that were more general. In addition some students, around 30%, preferred comments that only highlighted areas for development whilst 70% stated comments that protected their levels of confidence and were couched in positive language were more beneficial.

## V. Conclusions

The research within this project serves to confirm earlier research by Weedon (2000) with regard to the misinterpretation that can take place with written feedback, and which may prevent students using a deep approach. It also confirms the views of Higgins (2000) who highlights the dangers of making academic assumptions about the way students understand, perceive and are able to use written feedback. This latter point being due to the subjectivity and contested meaning involved in the communication process and the lack of access that some students may have to the knowledge, concepts and practices of HE and are unable to enter into shared understandings. When considering the agenda of widening participation, which is spurred on by Dearing (1997) and the diversity of students, in particular those who may be seen as non traditional, this issue is clearly a critical area and raises the importance of tutors exploring how their students have access to gaining understanding of academic language. Modules such as study skills, which attempt to aid students transition into HE and resolve this issue are reliant upon tutors themselves having shared definitions. Modularisation may increase the likelihood of students switching between different subject areas and disciplines, this further increases the need for the notion of shared understanding of language, concepts and practices between academic staff.

The research also highlights the effect assessment has on learning, which Biggs (1999 p141) labels as '*backwash*' and identifies that students focus of attention is concerned with assessment activities. The research within this project would suggest that when an assessment activity was complete the students' learning concerning that particular subject was also completed. Some students appear to be using written feedback to aid their construction of future assignments rather than reflect on subject areas and their understanding that requires further exploration. In addition the research also suggests that, ironically, the amount of assessment activities actually hampered some students adopting a deep approach, which is congruent with the notion of assessment overload (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Biggs 1999).

The research also indicates that whilst some students require encouraging to use written feedback that is meaningful to their learning all of those interviewed required further support and guidance in how to achieve this. This would appear to be the crux of the question of this paper [written feedback and deep approaches to student learning: contradictory or complimentary?]. Unless students are able to interpret the feedback as the tutor intended it is unlikely that written feedback will lead to a deep approach, and, of equal importance, if students are unable to use the comments due to their inexperience or reflective abilities it is also unlikely that a deep approach will be used. Reflection is according to Moon (2000) and Thorpe (2000) an activity that not everyone finds easy and the capacity to effectively reflect

varies amongst individuals. In addition, and possibly due to 'backwash' (Biggs 1999) if students are not actively encouraged to engage in reflective activities that may enhance their learning, some will choose to opt out, or, as is the case may not opt in! As Shuell, (1986, cited in Biggs 1999 p25) states *"If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in the learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes..... It is helpful to remember that what a student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does"*.

To aid the conceptualisation of suggestions of how written feedback may be used that is complimentary to adopting a deep approach there are two areas that should be considered for further research and academic practice.

### **Directions For Further Research:**

Atkins (1995 p27) highlights the need for departments to analyse tutors written feedback to *"ascertain the extent to which it is engaging with the intellectual argument rather than the presentation and format"*. Whilst Mutch's (2001) research would confirm that the Faculty in which his research was conducted is engaging with the intellectual argument, it would be of value for this type of research to be extended. It is also worth noting that Mutch also concludes from his research that written feedback could be improved where students are achieving at a lower level, where students are less likely to be able to take advantage of the comments, possibly due to their academic ability, which appears to be congruent with the research contained in this paper.

Weedon (2000) has developed a tool which she refers to as the 'Kelly Analysis' which coupled with the use of open questions provided a valuable tool that enabled students to explore the understanding of written feedback and from the analysis of results, aided their development as reflective practioners and students. It is also worth noting that the tool was commented on as being of high value to their learning by students who have used this particular methodology. Weedon does highlight that it should not be assumed that findings can be applied to other students however she does suggest that other tutors could develop the tool for their own students use.

As such a further investigation of how this may be may be progressed would appear to be worthwhile. One may also see a use for this type of instrument to be built into the student Progress Files due to be introduced within Higher Education in the near future.

### **Academic Practice:**

Academic staff may wish to ascertain the opportunities that their students have for accessing and gaining meaning to the discourses of HE, and if they share the same meaning of these discourses, particularly where modularisation occurs, across different academic disciplines and subject areas.

There is also a need to ensure that the curriculum leaves time for students to learn the important elements, as Fox and Radloff (1998 p565) say "*try unstuffing the curriculum*" which refers to issues within programme and module planning and design that focus on developing lifelong learning skills rather than subject content alone. Which is commensurate with the notion of lifelong learning skills and the goals of HE and a key aspect the Dearing report (1997).

Tutors may wish to reflect and analyse their own written feedback practice(s) and explore whether it is promoting understanding and critical thinking, where appropriate, engaging with the students work and the extent to which it is meeting the criteria presented on pages vi and vii of this paper.

Mary Thorpe (2000) when discussing how to encourage students to reflect as part of the assignment process is keen to stress that the critical issues are those of providing learning for both students and tutors to develop reflexivity and tying reflection into the goals of the programme, the latter point being also highlighted by Mutch (2001).

Mutch (2001) suggests that written feedback is supplemented in some way such as through group feedback that utilise web pages and interactive sessions. One may envisage the use of Virtual Learning Portals to facilitate online discussions, which would also promote the use of information technology and further build in transferable skills. Seminar activities may be utilised where students are required to engage with their feedback and that of other students, where appropriate, particularly where continuous and or formative assessment is being practiced.

Any practices that are adopted should be clearly relevant to the programme, in addition the need for engaging in the activities should be transparent to the students. If students are focussed on assessment activities (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury 1997, Biggs 1999) there may be a need to integrate this type of activity within the programme, or module assessment such as the completion of learning diaries, engaging in action learning set activities, or some form of discursive and reflective written or verbal presentation. This contradicts the notion of assessment overload and to include more forms of assessing students would be unfair and counter-productive, however if students are to fully engage with and utilise their comments thought may be given to amending existing arrangements to include this type of assessed activity.

The overall aim of this project and subsequent paper has been to explore if written feedback is complimentary or contradictory to students adopting a deep approach to their learning. It would appear that there are a number of factors that need to be present for this to take place. There are structural issues such as the tone, clarity, timeliness and level of detail which are important in promoting this approach. However issues of interpretation, how

students use the feedback and the activities they engage in are of equal importance and need to be attended to if a deep approach is to be engendered and or maintained.



## i. Reference List

Anderson, D., Grown, S., and Race, P. 1998. **500 Tips for Further and Continuing Education Lecturers.** London: Kogan Page

Atkins, M., 1995. 'What Should We be Assessing?' In Knight, P., (ed.), 1998. **Assessment for Learning in Higher Education.** London: Kogan Page in association with the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)

Brown, S. and Knight, P., 1998. **Assessing Learners in Higher Education: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.** London: Kogan Page

Brown, G., Bull, J., and Pendlebury, M., 1997. **Assessing Students in Higher Education.** London: Routledge

Biggs, J., 1999. **Teaching for Quality Learning at University.** Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and Open University Press

Dearing, R., ed., 1997. **Higher Education in the Learning Society.** London: HMSO

Falchicove, N. 1998. Improving Feedback To and From Students. In Knight, P. (ed.) 1998. **Assessment for Learning in Higher Education.** London: Kogan Page in association with the Staff and Development Association (SEDA)

Fox, R and Radloff, A., 1998. No Time for Students to Learn Important Skills? Try 'Unstuffing' the Curriculum. In Rust, C. (ed.) 1998. **Improving Student Learning. Improving Students as Learners.** Oxford: The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University

Greer, L., 2002. **Approaches to Learning: An International Comparison of Higher Education in the Former Socialist States Of central And Eastern Europe.** [Online], URL <http://www.business.itsn.ac.uk/events/BEST%2002/Papers/Greer.PDF>> [Accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2002].

Higgins, R. A, 2000. **"59% - Excellent". Making sense of Assessment feedback.** Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, Learning and Teaching Institute, Sheffield Hallam University. Public Resources: ILTAC 2000: Session 1/054 index. [Online], URL <http://www.ilt.ac.uk/iltac2000/higgins/default.htm>> [Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2002].

Knight, P., ed., 1998. **Assessment for Learning in Higher Education**. London: Kogan Page in association with the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)

Moon, J., A., 2000. **Reflection in Learning and Professional Development; Theory and Practice**. London: Kogan page

Mutch, A., 2001. **Reviewing Feedback Practice: an exploratory study of NBS practice**. Unpublished paper

Race, P., 1996. **Changing Assessment to Improve Learning: Summary of the final interactive keynote session led by Professor P. Race at the 1<sup>st</sup> Northumbria Assessment Conference, UK on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September**.

[Online], URL

<http://www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/assessment/keynote.html>> [Accessed: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2002].

Race, P., 2002. **Using Feedback to Help Students to Learn**. [Online], URL <https://www.ilt.ac.uk/portal>> [Accessed: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2002].

Race P., and Brown, S., 2001. **The ILT A Guide: Inspiring Learning about Teaching and Assessment**. York: Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in association with EducationGuardian.co.uk

Rowntree, D., 1997. **Assessing Students: How shall we know them?** London: Kogan Page

Rust, C., (2002). **Active Learning in Higher Education**. The Institute of Learning and Teaching, volume 3 number 1 March

Thorpe, M., (2000). Encouraging students to Reflect as Part of the Assignment Process. **Active Learning in Higher Education**. The Institute of Learning and Teaching, volume 1 number 1 pp 79 - 92

Weedon, E., 2000. **Do you read this the way I read this?** British Journal of Educational Technology. Oxford: Blackwell. Vol. 31, Number 3, 2000, pp185 – 197